DECISION RECORD

Decision: It is my decision to authorize the issuance of a term grazing permit for 252 Animal Units/1,966 Animal Unit Months at 65% pl for public lands on Allotment 64008, known as the Macho Ranch. Any additional mitigation measures identified in the environmental impacts sections of the attached environmental assessment have been formulated into stipulations, terms and conditions. Any comments made to this proposed treatment were considered and any necessary changes have been incorporated into the environmental assessment.

The fundamentals of rangeland health are identified in 43 CFR §§ 4180.1 and pertain to watershed function, ecological processes, water quality and habitat for threatened and endangered (T&E) species and other special status species. Based on the available data and professional judgement, the evaluation by this environmental assessment indicates that the conditions identified in the fundamentals of rangeland health exist on the allotment.

In accordance with 43 CFR §§ 4160.2, any applicant, permittee, lessee, or other affected interests may protest this proposed decision in person or in writing to the authorized officer within 15 days after receipt of this decision. Please be specific in your points of protest. In the absence of a protest, this decision will become final without further notice.

Written appeal may be filed to the Final Decision for the purpose of a hearing before an administrative law judge under 43 CFR §§ 4.470. A period of 30 days after receipt of the Final Decision is provided in which to file an appeal in this office. (43 CFR §§ 4160.3 (c))

Signed by T. R Kreager — 8/9/99
Assistant Field Manager — Date

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT
for
GRAZING AUTHORIZATION

ALLOTMENT 64008
Townships 6 South, Ranges 22 and 23 East
Various Sections

EA-NM-066-98-107

NOVEMBER, 1998

U.S. Department of the Interior
Bureau of Land Management
Roswell Field Office
Roswell, New Mexico

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I. Introduction

A. Purpose and Need for the Proposed Action

The grazing regulations (43 Code of Federal Regulations 4110) allow for ten year permits to be issued for grazing inside the grazing district. The Roswell Resource Management Plan/Environmental Impact Statement (RMP/EIS) (October, 1997) states a livestock grazing management goal of providing effective and efficient management of allotments to maintain, improve and monitor range conditions. A site specific analysis of the impacts of issuing a grazing permit to the applicant, Mrs. Bronson Corn., is needed for compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and to make an informed decision.

This document will analyze the site specifics of authorizing the issuance of the permit on Allotment 64008 known as the Macho Ranch, other future actions such as range improvement projects will be addressed in a project specific environmental assessment. This allotment is within the Mixed Desert shrub vegetative community, and the Grassland community as identified in the Roswell RMP/EIS. Vegetative communities managed by the Roswell Field Office are identified and explained in the RMP/EIS. Appendix 11 of the Draft RMP/EIS describes the Desired Plant Community (DPC) concept and identifies the components of each community.

B. Conformance with Land Use Planning

The Roswell RMP/EIS has been reviewed to determine if the proposed action conforms with the land use plan's Record of Decision. The Roswell RMP/EIS states a livestock grazing management goal of providing effective and efficient management of allotment to maintain, improve and monitor range conditions. The proposed action is consistent with the RMP/EIS.

C. Relationships to Statues, Regulations, or Other Plans

The proposed action is consistent with the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976 (FLPMA) (43 U.S.C. 1700 et seq.); the Taylor Grazing Act of 1934 (TGA) (43 U.S.C. 315 et seq.), as amended; the Clean Water Act (CWA) (33 U.S.C. 1251 et seq.), as amended; the Endangered Species Act (ESA) (16 U.S.C. 1535 et seq.) As amended; and the Public Rangeland Improvement Act of 1978 (PRIA) (43 U.S.C. 1901 et seq.)

II. Proposed Action and Alternatives

A. Proposed Action

The proposed action is to authorize a grazing permit on Allotment 64008 (Mrs. Bronson Corn, the Macho Ranch) for

Number and Kind of Livestock	Animal Units (AU's)	Period	Percent Federal Range	Type Use	Animal Unit Months (AUMs)
412 Sheep	82	yearlong	65%	Active	640
411 Goats	82	yearlong	65%	Active	640
86 Cattle	86	yearlong	65%	Active	670
2 Horses	2	yearlong	65%	Active	16
Allotment 64008 Total	252	yearlong	65%	Active	1966

252 Animal Units (AUs) year long at 65% Federal Range for 1966 Animal Unit Months (AUMs) for the term of ten years on Allotment 64008. The permit would be offered to the Mrs. Bronson Corn.

B. No Authorization Alternative

This alternative, if selected, would be to not issue a grazing permit for Allotment 64008. No grazing would be authorized on the federal land within the allotment.

III. Affected Environment

A. General Setting

Allotment 64008 is located in Chaves County, about twenty-eight miles northwest of Roswell, New Mexico. Allotment 64008 is made up of four pastures of various sizes and one trap. The allotment is watered by four wells; a water pipeline system, and dirt tanks. The allotment consists of 7,257 acres of public land, 3,810 acres of private land and 40 acres of uncontrolled

lands (See attached map).

Allotment 64008 (the Macho Ranch) lies inside the Roswell Grazing District Boundary, established subsequent to the Taylor Grazing Act, and it is administered under Section 3 of the TGA. The permitted use on a Section 3 permit is established by the amount of forage produced on the public lands and all other controlled lands, such as private, leased and state grazing leased lands. The public animal unit months are then derived from the amount of forage from the public lands in relationship to all forage produced that is available for livestock. During the late 1930's and 40's the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and the allottee at that time agreed to the number of stock the ranch could run. Since then, BLM Roswell has been very involved in vegetation monitoring and range evaluations. Using this data adjustments to stocking rates and total numbers have been made on allotments throughout the resource area. BLM has established the number of stock allowed on the entire ranch, inclusive of all land status, excluding only lands which are not controlled by the allottee (not owned or leased).

Allotment 64008 consist of rolling grass covered hills, with a mixed desert shrub aspect. The average elevation ranges from 4,050 to 4,250 feet above sea level. Grass species make up 82 percent of the production in the existing plant community overall. The average recorded precipitation for the area is 12.58 inches (recorded in Roswell, NM). Most of the annual precipitation falls during high intensity, short duration thunderstorms occurring from May to October.

The following resources or values have been evaluated and are either not present or are not affected by the proposed action or alternatives in the EA: Prime/Unique Farmlands, Cultural Resources, Native American Religious Concerns, Wild and Scenic Rivers, Riparian Zones/Wetlands, Hazardous Wastes, and Areas of Critical Environmental Concern. The impact of the proposed action and alternative to minority or low-income populations or communities has been considered and no significant impact is anticipated.

B. Affected Resources

1. Soils

Soils on Allotment 64008 are the Alama-Poquita association, nearly level, the Ector very cobbly loam, 3-15% slopes, Ector very cobbly loam, dry 3-15% slopes, the Hollomex, moist-Milner-Reeves, moist loamns, moderately undulating, the Reagan-Conger association, moderately undulating and the Reeves, moist-Milner-Hollomex, moist association, gently undulating.

These soils are anywhere from deep to shallow soils, which are well drained; they are nearly level to sloping soils on alluvial side slopes, hills, ridges and upland.

More information on these soils can be found in the “Soil Survey of Chaves County, New Mexico, Northern Part”.

2. Vegetation

The majority of the vegetation on the public land within Allotment #64008 fits five major range sites: Shallow SD-3, Very Shallow CP-4, Gyp Upland SD-3, Loamy SD-3 and Shallow CP-2. Black grama, tobosa, blue grama, and sideoats grama are the most abundant grasses, while hairy grama, Halls panicum, vine mesquite, wolftail, sand dropseed, tridens, muhlys, and three-awn are also found. Shrubs such as catclaw acacia, yucca, broom snakeweed, littleleaf sumac, mesquite and dalea are also found on here. Forbs which may occur in this area are buckwheat, croton, dysodia, bladderpod, and globemallow.

The forb component in all of the range sites varies from year to year, dependent upon the amount and timing of precipitation.

3. Wildlife

The area provides habitat for small animals, birds, rodents, and a sustainable population of mule deer. The area does contain motts of brush or tree species that could provide quality cover for the larger animals. The allotment is within the Macho Wildlife Habitat Area (WHA). The management goal for the WHA is to manage for a healthy population of pronghorn within the special management area. Other game species occurring within the area include mourning dove, and scaled quail. Raptors that utilize the area on a more seasonal basis include the Swainson's, red-tailed, and ferruginous hawks, American kestrel, and great-horned owl. Numerous passerine birds utilize the grassland areas due to the variety of grasses, forbs, and shrubs. The most common include the western meadowlark, mockingbird, horned lark, killdeer, loggerhead shrike, and vesper sparrow.

The warm prairie environment supports a large number of reptile species compared to higher elevations. The more common reptiles include the short-horned lizard, lesser earless lizard, eastern fence lizard, coachwhip, bullsnake, prairie rattlesnake, and western rattlesnake.

A general description of wildlife occupying or potentially utilizing the proposed action area is located in the Affected Environment Section (p. 3-62 to 3-71) of the Draft Roswell RMP/EIS (9/1994).

4. Threatened and Endangered Species

The only known threatened or endangered species of plant or animals on Allotments 64008 is the bald eagle. A list of federal threatened, endangered and candidate species reviewed for this EA can be found in Appendix 11 of the Roswell Approved RMP (AP11-2). Of the listed species, avian species such as the bald eagle and peregrine falcon may be observed in the general geographic area during migration or winter months. There are no designated critical habitat areas within this allotment. The swift fox is a Federal Candidate species that may occupy or utilize the area, refer to the Biological Opinion (AP11-38) in the Roswell RMP for a detailed description of the range, habitats and potential threats.

5. Livestock Management

The allotments are grazed by cattle, goats and sheep, using a cow-calf and a sheep operation.

The latest grazing permit on Allotment 64008 was for 252 animal units; most currently run were 85 cattle, 412 sheep, 411 goats and 2 horses. Pastures containing sheep are grazed yearlong, while cattle are moved through the four pastures. Generally, pastures are given a growing season rest every three to four years. Selection of pastures for rest from cattle grazing is based on vegetative conditions. Numbers of livestock within the active pastures is based on vegetative conditions so that overuse does not occur. The trap is used to hold stock for short periods, for example, after stock are gathered and worked, the calves or lambs are held in the trap prior to shipping. Lambing is timed to fall after April 10, to avoid conflict with migrating eagles populations. First year heifers are occasionally kept in the trap, until they have calved. When weather conditions such as drought occur, stocking rates are reduced over the entire allotment.

6. Visual Resources

Allotment 64008 is located in a Class IV Visual Resource Management (VRM) Area. The Class IV rating means that contrasts may attract attention and be a dominant feature in the landscape in terms of scale. However, changes should repeat the basic elements of the landscape.

7. Water Quality

Dirt tanks are the only surface water on the allotment, some of which are located on the public land. The amount of water and period of retention in the dirt tanks is dependent on the weather conditions. Ground water is pumped from four drilled wells. The quality of the well water is adequate for livestock and wildlife use.

8. Flood-plains

Within this allotment, flood-plains exist that are recorded on Federal Emergency Management Agency maps. The identified flood-plain is generally the major drainage along the Arroyo Del Macho. Water pipelines, fences and roads cross the flood-plain, no adverse impacts have resulted from these improvements. Future permanent, above-ground structures will be authorized on BLM lands within the flood-plains only if no practicable alternative exists. Only minor additional development, such as fencing, would be expected, but no projects are currently planned.

9. Air Quality

Air quality is good. The area is in a Class II area for the prevention of significant deterioration of air, as defined in the federal Clean Air Act. Class II areas allow a moderate amount of air quality degradation.

10. Recreation, Caves and Karst

Recreation: Dispersed recreational opportunities exist in Allotment 64008 as access to the public land is available through State lands and along county maintained roads. Dispersed recreational activities include hunting, caving, fishing, sightseeing, bird watching, primitive camping, mountain biking, horseback riding and hiking. Off Highway Vehicle designation for public lands within this allotment are classified as "Limited" to existing roads and trails. The majority of public lands in this allotment can only be accessed by foot (hiking, or walking).

Caves and Karst: This allotment is located within a designated area of high Karst and Cave Potential.

Although a complete significant cave or karst inventory has not been completed for the public lands located in this grazing allotment, a significant cave or karst feature is known to exist within this allotment. Monitoring of the Cave/Karst feature will be necessary to determine if protective measures are required in the future.

Off Highway Vehicle designation for the public land within these allotments is classified as "Limited" to existing roads and trails.

IV. Environmental Impacts

A. Impacts of the Proposed Action

1. Soils

The soils will be influenced by livestock grazing directly by compaction, trailing that may break through the turf, chipping of soil surface caused by hoof action, and recycling of nutrients. Infiltration rates will be increased by chipping of soil surface over most of the area but will be decreased by compaction around watering, trailing, and bedding areas. The area of compaction would be relatively small. Livestock remove vegetation that would have reduced the erosive forces of wind, rain and surface runoff. Proper utilization levels and grazing distribution patterns under the present operation retain sufficient vegetative cover so as to maintain the stability of the soils. The level of grazing identified in the proposed action would continue to maintain an adequate ground cover for protection and the development of the soils. The percentage of bare ground and rock found on the public land within the allotment fall within the parameters established by the RMP/EIS for these vegetative communities.

2. Vegetation

Vegetation grazing by domestic livestock and wildlife is not adversely affected unless the amount of utilization is severe over an extended period of time. Vegetative studies on this allotments were established in 1982. Ecological condition as shown by the data collected from 1982 through 1992 indicate the vegetation is sustainable to meet the multiple resource requirements and forage for 252 Animal units for Allotment 64008. The most recent data shows the ecological condition for the area evaluated to be in good condition, showing an upward trend with ratings of 52.63 to 65.67. Copies of the monitoring data and the analysis of the data are available at the Roswell Field Office.

The following table summarized monitoring data for the Mrs. Bronson Corn Allotment; these averages are weighted in relation to pasture size.

Monitoring Data Summary, Allotment Averages from 1982 to 1993							
	Grasses	Forbs	Shrubs	Trees	Litter	Bare Ground	Rocks
Percent composition of vegetative cover	80.62	3.25	15.85	0.15	N/A	N/A	N/A
Percent Ground Cover	23.06		6.01		16.07	25.31	30.05

3. Wildlife

Domestic livestock will continue to utilize vegetative resources needed by a variety of wildlife species for life history functions within this allotment. The magnitude of livestock grazing impacts on wildlife is dependent upon the species of wildlife being considered, and it's habitat needs. In general, livestock stocking rate adjustments have been made in the past to minimize the direct competition for those vegetative resources needed by a variety of wildlife species. Cover habitat for wildlife will remain the same as the existing situation. Maintenance and operation of existing waterings will continue to provide dependable water sources for wildlife, as well as livestock.

4. Threatened and Endangered Species

Livestock grazing as a result of the grazing permit, May affect, but not likely adversely affect the bald eagle and peregrine falcon. It is expected that habitat and range condition would be maintained or improved by authorizing grazing conducive with vegetation production goals. Habitat for wintering bald eagles would not have significant negative impacts by livestock grazing since there is no presence of riparian and aquatic habitats nearby , and no active or suitable nesting habitat. Positive impacts may result to the bald eagle from the proposed action by increasing the amount of carrion during the late winter and early spring in sheep allotments.

5. Livestock Management

The proposed action would allow the existing livestock management to continue. The existing management is not causing any adverse impacts to the environment. The distribution and supply of livestock water is available for wildlife. Livestock under rotation grazing will continue to maintain or increase ground cover by stimulating growth of vegetation and by scattering litter which protects the soil from wind and water erosion.

6. Visual Resources

Visual resources will be managed to meet the Visual Resource Management class. All proposed management activities will be evaluated with regard to visual resource management and those project that are compatible with the character of the natural landscape will be encouraged. No management actions should be proposed that would degrade visual quality to the extent that a change in any VRM class will result. The continued grazing of livestock would not affect the form or color of the landscape, or the primary aspect of the vegetation within the allotment.

7. Water Quality

Livestock grazing will not have an significant influence on water quality. Any surface water is located in dirt tanks which have received the limited amount of runoff. The amount of sediment into the dirt tanks is directly related to the intensity and duration of the precipitation occurrence and affected only slightly by livestock grazing activities. Ground water is pumped from the four wells. The ground water is not affected by livestock grazing.

8. Floodplains

No impacts to the floodplains are known; by keeping above ground structures out of the floodplains, impacts should not occur.

9. Air Quality

The proposed action will not have an effect on the air quality. The air quality will remain virtually the same as present.

10. Recreation, Caves and Karst

Grazing should have little or no impact on the dispersed recreational opportunities within Allotment 64008, since the recreational use of these public lands are relatively low. The evidence or presence of livestock can negatively affect visitors who desire solitude, unspoiled landscape views or hike without seeing signs of livestock. However, grazing can benefit some forms or recreation, such as hunting, by creating new water sources for game animals.

Continued grazing of the allotment may affect significant caves or karst resources if protective measures are not followed. If monitoring determines that significant caves or karst features are being affected by grazing, additional protective measures will be required. The protective measures could include, but are not limited to, the following actions: Fencing sinks, cave entrances or arroyos from multiple-use impacts; removing check-dams, erosion control projects and stock ponds; closing roads; no chemical vegetation removal. The area around significant caves or karst features should be treated sensitively, so no adverse impacts affect the cave or karst feature

B. Impacts of the No Livestock Grazing Alternative

1. Soils

The soil will not be subjected to compaction, chipping or standing vegetation reduction that is associated with livestock grazing. The stability and development of the soil would be about the same as with grazing. Soil compaction would be reduced on the allotment around drinking troughs and along trails.

2. Vegetation

There would be small change in the types and amounts of vegetation found within the allotment. It is expected that the number of plant species found within the allotment will remain the same. Vegetation will continue be utilized by wildlife but the removal of the standing vegetation by livestock would be absent. This would result in an increase in the amount of standing vegetation

and an increase in the accumulated litter on the ground.

3. Wildlife

There would be no competition between livestock and wildlife for forage or cover.

4. Threatened and Endangered Species

There would be no change to the bald eagle if the no grazing alternative was selected.

5. Livestock Management

Under the no grazing alternative there would be no grazing on the federal land in the area of Allotment 64008. This would have an adverse economic impact to the livestock operation.

6. Visual Resources

No change in the visual resources, scale, land-form, and color will occur with the no grazing alternative.

7. Water Quality

A slight improvement in surface water quality will be achieved with the no grazing alternative. This is anticipated because the removal of standing vegetation will not be occurring to the degree allowed in the proposed action. More standing vegetation will slow runoff during precipitation events which will reduce sediments into the water. Ground water will not be changed by the no grazing alternative.

8. Floodplains

Impacts would be the same as the proposed action.

9. Air Quality

There would be no change to the air quality with the no grazing alternative.

10. Recreation, Caves and Karst.
This alternative would have no effect on recreation, caves or karst features.

V. Cumulative Impacts

Cumulative impacts of the grazing and no grazing alternatives were considered in Chapter 4 of Rangeland Reform '94 Draft Environmental Impact Statement (p. 28) and in Chapter 4 of the Roswell Resource Area Proposed RMP/EIS (pp. ROD-2). The no livestock grazing alternative was not selected in either document.

All of the allotments that have permits or leases with BLM will have to go through scoping and analysis under NEPA. Allotments #64008 are surrounded by allotments that will be undergoing this process. If the proposed action is selected, there would be no change in the cumulative impacts since it does not vary from the current situation.

If the no livestock grazing alternative is selected, there would be little change in the cumulative impact as long as the surrounding allotments continue to be stocked at their current level. If the permitted numbers are reduced or eliminated on the surrounding ranches as well, the economics of the surrounding communities and or minority/low income populations would be negatively impacted.

VI. Residual Impacts

The area has been grazed by livestock since the early part of the 1900's, if not longer. Recent vegetative monitoring studies have shown that grazing, at the permitted numbers of animals under Alternative A is sustainable. If the mitigation measures are enacted, then there would be no residual impacts to the proposed action.

VII. Mitigating Measures

Vegetation monitoring studies will continue to be conducted and the permitted numbers of livestock will be adjusted if necessary. If new information surfaces that livestock grazing is negatively impacting other resources, action will be taken at that time to mitigate those impacts.

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT/RATIONALE

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT: I have reviewed this environmental assessment including the explanation and resolution of any potentially significant environmental impacts. I have determined the proposed action will not have significant impacts on the human environment and that preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is not required.

Rational for Recommendations: The proposed action would not result in any undue or unnecessary environmental degradation. The proposed action will be in compliance with the Roswell Resource Management Plan and Record of Decision (October, 1997)

_____ _____

T. R. Kreager, Date
Acting Assistant Field Office Manager - Resources